



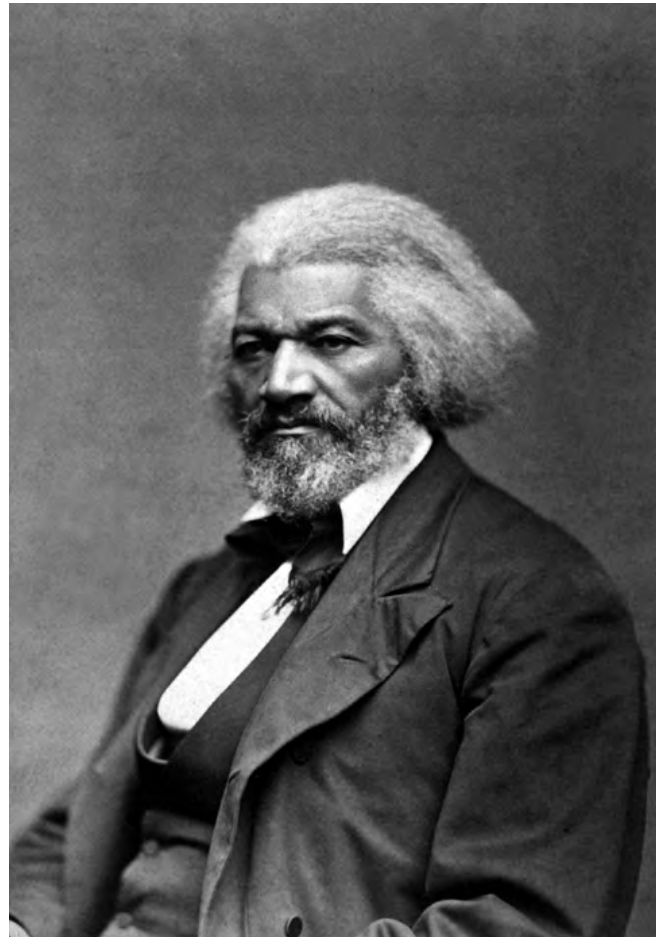
Excerpt from “What the Black Man Wants”

The following selection is from a speech delivered by Frederick Douglass to the Annual Meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society in April 1865—just before the end of the Civil War.

“What I ask for the Negro is not benevolence, not pity, not sympathy, but simply justice. The American people have always been anxious to know what they shall do with us...Everybody has asked the question...“What shall we do with the Negro?” I have had but one answer from the beginning. Do nothing with us! Your doing with us has already played the mischief with us. Do nothing with us!...All I ask is, give him a chance to stand on his own legs! Let him alone! If you see him on his way to school, let him alone, don’t disturb him! If you see him going to the dinner table at a hotel, let him go! If you see him going to the ballot-box, let him alone, don’t disturb him! If you see him going into a work-shop, just let him alone,—your interference is doing him a positive injury...If you will only untie his hands, and give him a chance, I think he will live. He will work as readily for himself as the white man.”

DISCUSS:

- What is benevolence? How is this different from justice?
- Why do you think Douglass’ plea is, “Do nothing with us!”? What does he most want for Black Americans?
- After the Civil War and emancipation, do you think Black people were “let alone”? What do you know about this period or what do you suppose were the circumstances for newly freed Black people?



Frederick Douglass (1818–1895) was an important writer, speaker and leader in the struggle for equal rights for Black people. After escaping from slavery in Maryland, he lived in Massachusetts and New York, and became a leader of the national movement to abolish slavery.